before they began by BlueWall (MsMrs)

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Summary:

First grade is tough. Especially for Will Byers, who can't seem to be strong enough to fend for himself.

before they began

Author's Note:

> Jeez, I'm productive today. But this idea came to my mind and I had to write it down. Again, no smut (duh), but I really wanted to write something about Mike's and Will's relationship. Also, absolutely ZERO proof reading was done to this.

Will Byers officially hated first grade. After only a month, he‘d had enough of it. The constant teasing. The others laughing about him.

Just last Friday, Yvonne Mellor had come over to his desk, and asked „Do you wanna kiss me?“. Will‘s mind had made a strange flip. His dad had told him, boys were supposed to kiss girls. He had figured, if he‘d kiss her, his dad would be proud, so he had said „Yes.“. Instead of kissing Will, though, Yvonne had shouted „Ew! Willy Byers said he wants to kiss me!“, at which all the girls had screamed with disgust, and the boys had made gagging sounds. Will had spent the whole weekend in his room, buried in comic books, not even letting his mom or Jonathan in. Not even Mike.

Mike, his best friend, who Will knew could have made it better. Mike always did. He was tall, almost as tall as Troy, and a lot stronger than Will. He was everything Will wanted to be. Or be with. But he hadn‘t wanted to see his friend that weekend. Will‘s dad had said, he‘d have to stand up for himself. Punch people in the face if necessary.

Will needed Mike. But he didn‘t want to need him, because he hated being weak.

„Will?“

„Yeah?“ Will looked up from his sketchbook, interrupting his doodling to look at Mike, who was sitting next to him. The teacher was five minutes overdue. Mike spoke quietly, so the others wouldn‘t hear them.

„Are you okay?“

„Yeah. Why?“ Mike furrowed his brows at that, and Will marveled at how well his only friend knew him.

„I tried seeing you last weekend.“ Mike said. Will turned his head back around, and continued drawing in his small, blue book.

„I know. Didn‘t want to see you.“ he mumbled.

„Your mom told my mom on the phone.“ Mike nodded. „But why?“

„Didn‘t feel good.“ Will shrugged.

„Was it because of Yvonne?“ Again, Will couldn‘t help but be impressed at how well Mike knew him. That only made it hurt more, though. „I could tell her to apologize.“

„Can you leave me alone?“ Will hissed. He didn‘t want to look at Mike, but in the corner of his eye, he could see the boy slump in his chair. He felt cold all over for doing this, but it was for the better. Will couldn‘t allow himself to need help. So he didn‘t answer to Mike anymore, the whole day, only saying the necessary bits. No matter how hard Mike tried, Will built a wall around himself, purposefully trying to keep everyone out, even the one he trusted most.

„Watch out, Byers!“ The sarcastic warning came too late, of course. Will was already tripped over James‘ leg, lying on the ground. His shoulder hurt, and he had scraped his knee. Blood was dripping from a dirty wound, that sent a burning sensation up his left leg. Keeping his eyes closed, Will felt tears rising up. Why? He had managed to avoid Troy and his cronies all day. Why did it have to hit him right after school was out? At least, James was alone, so he might be able to get away.

„Stop it!“ Mike‘s shout from somewhat far away, strong and loud, pierced the still warm September air. „Get away from him!“ Will refused to open his eyes, when he heard an impact above him, dull and accompanied by a sharp exhale. Then, a second impact, next to Will on the ground. A long groan, then a commotion, followed by scurrying footsteps, and an enraged cry „You‘re gonna pay for this, Wheeler!“ Finally, Will opened his eyes. Above him, illuminated by the golden sunlight, Mike was making a worried face, rubbing his left shoulder, where he had probably collided with James.

„You okay?“ Mike reached for Will, but he just slapped the hand away, a sudden rush of rage boiling in his insides.

„I‘m fine.“ he snapped. „Leave me alone!“ Gnashing his teeth with pain, Will heaved himself to his feet. He hated this. He hated how he was small and weak. Even standing on his toes, he still had to look up to Mike. „I‘m going home!“ Mike probably wanted to say something, but he didn‘t yell after Will. The smaller boy ran off, ignoring the searing pain in his leg and shoulder. He passed houses, stores, people, cars, bikes, but everything flew by in a blur, until he reached his home. His parents‘ cars weren‘t in the driveway, and Jonathan‘s bike was nowhere to be found either, so Will eventually allowed himself to sob. He all but kicked open his bedroom door, threw his backpack against the wall, and headed straight to the bathroom. Only now he realized how lucky he was. Had he worn long pants, they‘d be ruined, and his dad would yell at him about money, and being ungrateful.

Still crying heavily, but with steady hands, Will climbed onto the toilet seat, from where he could reach the cabinet with the bandages. First, he wet a paper towel and cleaned the wound, revealing it to be large, covering his entire knee. Will used a few drops of disinfectant after that. His tears just built up faster from the sting. With more skill than a child his age should possess, he pushed a compress on his knee, and wrapped a long, white bandage neatly around it several times, before he tucked the end of it into the loop, and pulled it tight.

Will‘s crying had turned into faint sniffling, when he closed the door to his room behind himself. Sitting down on his bed, he took one of his pillows to his lap, and buried his face in it. *Mike.* He needed Mike, and the thought of how he had hurt his friend made him burst out into tears again.

His tears had long run dry, when he heard the hammering engine of his dad‘s beat up Oldsmobile in front of the house. Then heavy, irregular footsteps. The front door flew open audibly.

„Joyce!“ Lonnie Byers yelled, obviously at least slightly drunk. „Give me ten bucks, gotta repair my rear light. Joyce?“ Will‘s heart picked up speed, when the footsteps neared his room. He hurried to get one of his textbooks open on the desk. „Where‘s that fucking bitch?“ These last words were only mumbled, but his dad was already so close to the door, Will could clearly hear him. When Lonnie burst into his room, Will had his hands clenched in fists. „Where‘s your mother, kid?“ Will only shrugged.

„At work, maybe.“ he mumbled.

„Yeah, she better be.“ his dad grunted, turning around to leave. Will was almost relieved, but Lonnie spun around again. He paced the small bedroom with two steps, suddenly towering in front of Will. He smelled disgusting, a bit like the disinfectant Will had used on his leg. „What‘s that?“ he asked, pointing at the bandage around Will‘s knee.

„Some guy tripped me.“

„And you did what about it?“

„Shoved him.“ Will lied, well aware of the fact that he couldn‘t tell the truth, or he‘d likely be shouted at again. „He won‘t do it again.“ Lonnie‘s eyes pierced him for only a second.

„That a boy...“ the man slurred, hurting Will at a drunken attempt to ruffle his hair. „Tell your mother to meet me at Mick‘s workshop when she‘s home.“ With that, he turned back around, and soon, Will heard gravel under tires again. Even when his dad was long gone, his heart was still beating up to his throat. Only one thought remained: *Mike*. Mike would even stand up to Lonnie Byers, if he needed to. God, why couldn‘t Will just fend for himself?

It was already dark out, when he woke. Will didn‘t know when exactly he had fallen asleep, but he could hear the sound of the TV from the living room. The music of *Bigfoot and Wildboy* was playing, so his dad almost certainly wasn‘t home. His knee didn‘t hurt too bad anymore, and with a bit of effort, he managed not to limp. Will stepped into the living room, where he found Jonathan on the couch, and his mom ironing clothes in the corner. She greeted him with a warm smile.

„Good evening, sleepyhead.“ she chuckled. „Didn‘t want to wake you up.“

„Hey, Will.“ Jonathan said, eyes glued to the small black-and-white TV. Will took a quick glance at the screen, and decided, he liked the show more on Mike‘s color TV. In an instant, he felt his pretend smile drop from his face.

„Did you fall, honey?“ his mom asked. „You did a good job on that bandage.“ Jonathan‘s head jerked around to him so fast, Will would have laughed, had he been in a better mood.

„Will?“ his brother was on his feet already. „Was that one of those sons of-“

„Language!“ Joyce shouted, before Jonathan got a chance to say it. Jonathan hadn‘t even begun his protest, when Will said

„It‘s alright. I just tripped.“ Technically, not a lie, he really had tripped. He figured, they wouldn‘t talk to Lonnie about it, so he could tell his mom and brother a different story. Thinking of Lonnie, he felt his heart pick up pace again. „Mom, dad told me he‘s waiting at Mick‘s!“ Joyce rolled her eyes at that, but gave him a pained look.

„It‘s okay, honey. I met him in town a few hours ago.“ Most of his tension left Will. One slap to the face avoided.

„Want me to take a look at it?“ Jonathan had seemingly waited for a chance to speak. „You cleaned it, right? Disinfected too?“

„Yeah.“ Will sighed. „It‘s alright, really.“ The truth was, it wasn‘t alright. Nothing was, because Mike wasn‘t here. His words proved convincing enough for his mom, though. In her defense, she looked dead-tired.

„Well, alright then. Don‘t think you‘ll get to stay up late tonight, just because you‘re been sleeping all afternoon.“ she scolded half-heartedly. „Now go fetch your dinner. Meat loaf.“ Will hurried to the kitchen. „By the way...“ Joyce shouted after him. „Mike‘s mom called earlier. Looks like he wanted to come over.“

„I‘ll see him tomorrow.“ Will shouted back, cold regret filling every inch of him. The thought that Mike still wanted to see him brought tears to his eyes again. Will decided to eat alone in the kitchen.

Yawning, Will walked the streets of Hawkins. of course, he hadn‘t gotten a lot of sleep last night. In that regard though, his mother was merciless. Though, he hadn't even asked her to let him stay at home. So now, on his way to school, he only wished he had a bike, like everyone else. His dad had said something like „Kid‘s got two legs. Doesn‘t need a bike.“, but according to Jonathan, Lonnie just liked spending what little he had on booze. Either way, he had to walk, and that sucked. Especially with his still hurting leg. he had taken the bandage off in the morning, so now a huge spot of dark red scab adorned his knee. Now, he‘d have to face Mike.

Will did face Mike, but not the way he had expected. When he saw his friend for the first time that day, his heart stopped. Mike was in the parking lot, lying on the ground between two cars. Will wouldn‘t have noticed him, hadn‘t it been for Troy and James, hovering over him.

„You don‘t shove my friends, Wheeler.“ Troy hissed. He proceeded to spit on Mike. He *spat* on Mike, and that was enough to hang a red veil in front of Will‘s vision. He didn‘t even think a second, before charging the two, who luckily hadn‘t noticed him yet. Taking them by surprise, Will managed to jump up to their height, and knock their heads together, producing a thunk, that Will could swear, sounded hollow. Troy was the first one to react. Spinning around on the spot, he used the motion to let his fist swing long, and Will had no chance to dodge. Troy his him right on the cheek, and blinding, white pain shot through his skull. Will was already on the ground, when James

came to his senses.

„Byers!“ he snarled. „I thought I taught you a lesson yesterday.“ Will couldn‘t speak, the wind entirely knocked out of him for the moment. It got worse, when James kicked him in the side, which made Will feel like throwing up. He was preparing for something even worse, but it looked like, the bullies had enough. Troy didn‘t miss his opportunity to snort, and hit Will right in the face with his spit, before taking off towards the school.

„You tell anyone, you‘re dead.“ he growled over his shoulder, leaving Mike and Will, both breathing heavily, on the ground between the cars. It took a few, long minutes of throbbing pain, before Will found the strength to lift his head. Mike was already leaning against the dark green station wagon, eyes closed. His face was tear stained, with a busted lip that was bleeding on his white shirt. Looking down on himself, Will found his own shirt blood stained too, probably from his hurt cheek.

„Mike...“ he groaned. His friend‘s watery eyes snapped open. „You okay?“

„No.“ Mike said weakly, voice thick from crying, and the pain in his lip. „You‘re bleeding.“

„You too.“

„Shit.“

„You can‘t say the S-word!“ Will gasped.

„But it‘s shit.“ Mike repeated, mustering a faint smile.

„Yeah, it‘s shit.“ Will giggled, impressed by his own boldness. „Wanna go to the nurse?“

„Can you get up?“

Will somehow managed to get on his feet, and Mike did too. Walking was a different story, though. His knee had been scraped up again from the fall, and this time, it hurt far worse than the day before. Mike was quick to support Will, and for once, he didn‘t waste a thought on being weak. The hammering pain overshadowed even for that. When they swung the front door open together, the hall was already empty. Class had just started a minute or two ago. The nurse‘s office was the last door to the right, and neither Mike nor Will thought about knocking, instead pushing the door open. Will liked Mrs. Leary, the elderly nurse, whom he had met far too often.

„Dear god!“ she exclaimed, when she looked up from her desk. „What happened to you two?“ Will wanted to say something, but Mike, in his usual, quick-thinking manner, lied

„We fell off my bike.“

„Not the first time that happened, Michael Wheeler.“ Mrs. Leary said with a suspicious undertone. She quickly softened up, though. „Come

over here.“ One after the other, she picked them up with ease, and sat them down on the somewhat hard stretcher in the corner of her office. „You‘ll get band-aids for these.“ She pointed vaguely at their faces. „But I‘m going to have to tell Ms. Aldridge you two are here, and then I‘ll call your parents from the office.“

„Mrs. Leary...“ Will attempted, but the woman raised a finger. „You‘re going straight home, William Byers. You know, you manage to hurt yourself far too often for my taste.“ With that, she was gone, leaving Mike and Will alone on the stretcher, feet dangling down.

„Sorry.“ Will sighed, after a long silence.

„What for?“ Mike frowned. „It‘s not your fault.“

„It‘s *all* my fault.“ the smaller boy sniffled. „I can‘t even fight right.“

„Hey...“ Mike hushed. „You saved my ass out there.“ Again, Will‘s breath hitched when Mike was bold enough to say a forbidden word in the nurse‘s office. „I think they wanted to kill me.“

„How bad is it?“ he asked, feeling a bit better already.

„Hurts.“ Mike admitted, still with a lisp. His lip had stopped bleeding, but was dark red and swollen by now.

„My mom always kisses the places where it hurts. Makes it better.“

Will carefully said, making Mike laugh.

„Don‘t be silly. Boys can‘t kiss boys.“

„Yeah.“ Will mumbled, unable to explain to himself why his friend‘s words stung in his chest more than the fact, that he was the reason for all of this.

„But I‘m gonna tell my mom to try it.“ Mike laughed, before he hissed at the pain again, smile dropping from his swollen lips. „What about you? Your cheek looks pretty bad.“

„S‘okay.“ the smaller boy shrugged.

„It‘s not.“ Mike said matter-of-factly. „But it‘s gonna be.“ He didn‘t hesitate to put his long, lanky arm around Will‘s shoulders, pulling them as close together as possible. And suddenly, Will was safe. Together with Mike, he knew, nothing and no one could ever hurt him. And, even better, with Mike‘s arm around him, he felt taller than he actually was, and strong enough to stand up for himself and his best friend.

„Thanks...“ Mike mumbled. „...for being my friend.“

„Even if I get you in trouble?“

This time, Mike held his grin, despite the pain it was probably

causing him. „That way I don‘t get bored. And I... I kinda need you. You‘re my only friend.“

Will pushed himself further into the embrace, and that was how the Mrs. Leary found them, when she came to patch them up, and tell them she couldn‘t reach Will‘s parents, so she‘d send him home with Karen Wheeler.